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The African Collection at Liverpool Museum

LOUISE TYTHACOTT

Picasso's encounter with African sculpture at the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro in 1907 is considered to be a turning point in the European perception of non-European art. African forms in the environment of a museum had a decisive impact on Picasso's work, and indeed on the course of modern art. To a large degree, it was the French and German avant-garde's response to these exotic objects early in this century that precipitated the reconceptualization of what were then considered to be curios or scientific specimens into great works of art.¹

Art critics in Paris were also calling for a revaluation of non-European artifacts vis-à-vis the dominant European art apparatus. In 1920 Fénéon, for example, published the results of a survey of "twenty ethnographers and explorers, artists and aestheticians, collectors and dealers," whom he had asked, "Should tribal art be admitted to the Louvre?" While artists and art critics welcomed the idea of incorporating African objects into France's most prestigious art establishment, for the museum professionals—those aestheticians who guarded the boundaries of taste within orthodox French culture—the answer was *certainly not*. Salomon Reinach, the Louvre's Curator of National Antiquities, replied, "The wooden sculpture of the Negroes is hideous; to take pleasure in it would seem to be an aberration, when it is not simply a joke." Jean Guiffrey, Curator of Paintings, believed "it would be paradoxical to compare the stammerings of civilizations that have remained in their infancy, curious as they are, with the most perfect works of human genius" (Paudrat 1984:159).

Exotic artifacts have been discussed and exhibited in this century in radically different ways, ranging from extreme aestheticization to attempted recontextualization within the indigenous culture. In ethnographic museums, objects have tended to be displayed according to overarching organizational principles, arranged according to such categories as culture, geographical area, function, and type—with references made to the original social context wherever possible. Cases may be densely packed and surrounded with details on the peoples and cultures that artifacts are said to represent. Notions of function, context, original culture, and authenticity shroud the legitimacy of such displays.

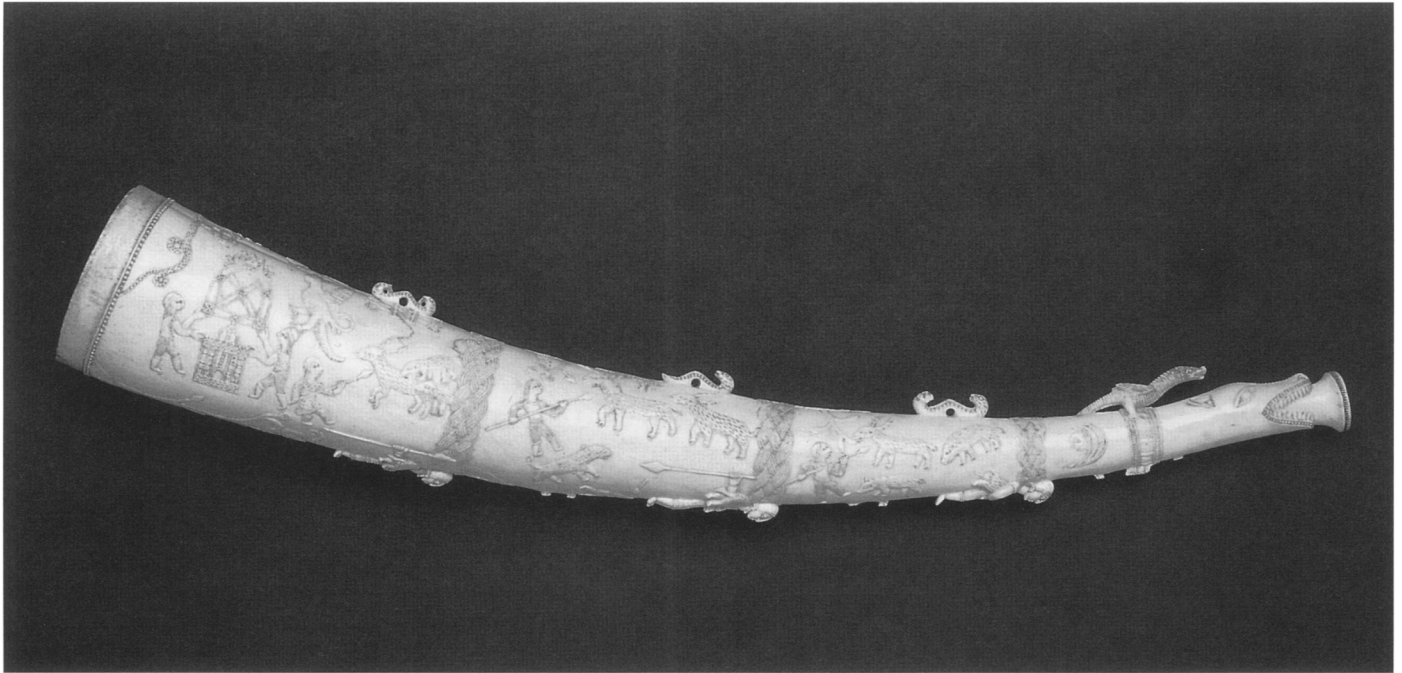
Some museums refer to non-European objects as "specimens," a natural history-inspired term which subsumes objects into series or types rather than perceiving them as individual

All objects in this article were photographed by David Flower and are reproduced courtesy of The Board of Trustees of the National Museums & Galleries on Merseyside (Liverpool Museum).

1. Double figure. Kongo peoples, Central Africa. Wood, beads, glass, vegetal material, pigment; 16.7cm (6.6"). Accn 11.5.82.2.

This sculpture was acquired by Liverpool Museum's Curator, Charles Gatty, in 1882. Although he was interested in promoting ethnography as a modern science, Gatty clearly appreciated the artistic qualities of the objects in the museum's African collection.





pieces. In certain museums which have natural history collections, they may be juxtaposed with mammals, birds, and flora from similar geographical areas, often in terms of an evolutionary paradigm. This intermeshing of nature and culture within the same institution can be seen in places such as the American Museum of Natural History in New York, the Horniman Museum and Gardens in London, and Liverpool Museum.

In an art gallery, on the other hand, non-European artifacts occupy very different physical and conceptual positions. The focus is no longer on context, on what objects reveal about life in other cultures, but rather on form. Non-European objects become framed and viewed in distinctive ways: they may be isolated; placed on plinths, pedestals, or special mounts; allocated individual cases; spotlighted from above. The language of labels and text panels tends to individualize, describing the maker (when known), material, donor, date, place of origin, and sometimes a description of the use of the object in ritual or culture. More general information on peoples, cultures, or geographies will be excluded. Such objects are labeled as "works" or "pieces" or, if considered particularly visually powerful, as "masterpieces." While an aesthetic

Above:

2. Oliphant. Sapi-Portuguese, Sierra Leone, 16th century. Ivory, length 57.2cm (22.5"). Accn 13014.

The horn is carved with scenes representing boar and stag hunting, harpies, and centaurs. The subjects suggest that the African artist drew inspiration from woodcut illustrations in early printed books on hunting or heraldry. Made for European export, perhaps commissioned for use in hunting, it is one of the ivories in the Fejérváry collection, donated to the museum in 1867 as part of the original Joseph Mayer bequest.

Right:

3. Figure. Kongo peoples, Zaire. Wood, glass, pigment; 23.7cm (9.3"). Accn 20.3.83.2.

Acquired in 1883, this figure is one of the early African sculptures in the ethnography collections.



approach subsumes and surrounds a non-European object with art historical value, traditional ethnographic displays attempt to relocate an artifact back within an original context. Taken to an extreme, both display methods become highly problematical.

Increasingly in the late twentieth century, the distinction between art and ethnography has been questioned and blurred through displays that focus simultaneously on form and cultural context. For example, three years ago, two of the exhibitions organized for *africa95*, the United Kingdom-wide celebration of African arts, inverted the traditional stereotyping. On one side of Burlington Gardens in London, the Royal Academy of Arts displayed a panoramic selection of what might normally

be considered ethnographic objects in the exhibition called "Africa: The Art of a Continent." The accompanying book describes the history and culture of each geographical region represented. At the back of Burlington Gardens, the Museum of Mankind mounted a display of contemporary metalwork sculpture by the London-based Nigerian artist Sokari Douglas Camp. Boundaries slip further and further, then, as a national art gallery exhibits "ethnography" and a national ethnography museum displays contemporary "art."

Over the past century, the African collections at Liverpool Museum (which became part of the National Museums & Galleries on Merseyside in 1986) have been interwoven into these debates on the distinction between ethnography and art. The following brief history will show how these objects have been collected, conceptualized, and exhibited in terms of their aesthetic qualities. The profile of the collection was formed through two key periods of acquisition. Over a quarter of the present holdings were gathered between 1895 and 1916 by a single donor, Arnold Ridyard, a chief engineer on the Elder Dempster Shipping Line. The second acquisition period took place almost fifty years later,

4. Pendant plaque, Benin kingdom, Nigeria, 18th/19th century. Bronze, 20.3cm (8"). Accn 24.4.1899.18.

This plaque, acquired in 1899, was worn by chiefs or titleholders on the left hip or chest. A range of Benin objects came to Liverpool Museum as early as 1897, after the British Punitive Expedition to Benin. The Director at the time, Dr. Henry Ogg Forbes, was among the first scholars to take an interest in and purchase Benin art.



when the focus of the museum's collecting policy was on masks and figurative sculpture from French West Africa. Overall the collection is now rich in sculpture from West and Central Africa.

The African Collections in the Late 19th Century

On May 3, 1852, an Act of Parliament established a Public Library, Museum and Gallery of Art, and the complex was formally opened on Shaw's Brow (now William Brown Street) on October 18, 1860. The museum was to accommodate a large and important collection of natural history specimens donated to the town by the XIIIth Earl of Derby in 1851. The profile of the museum changed dramatically in 1867, when Joseph Mayer, a Liverpool jeweler and goldsmith, donated his collection of "Art Treasures," including rare collections of ethnology (e.g., Fig. 2) as well as Egyptian, Classical, Medieval, and later antiquities. In a letter to the museum in February 1867, Mayer explained, "I always had in mind to make the collection as much illustrative of the arts of the differing nations as I could, so as to connect ancient and modern art" (in Worrall 1980:14).

The 1881 exhibition "Prehistoric Antiquities and Ethnography" was held not at Liverpool Museum but the Walker Art Gallery next door, perhaps for reasons of space. According to Charles Gatty, the museum's Curator, the display was intended to "promote Ethnography," considered to be "one of the most interesting and important branches of modern science....In both the ancient and modern groups exist the undeveloped germs of religious and artistic instincts....The committee believe that there is no town in England which could give such valuable help to the Study of Ethnography as Liverpool."² Although Gatty subsumed exotic artifacts into the dominant evolutionary paradigm of the time, he is also clearly aware of the aesthetic qualities of these collections (Fig. 1). The committee even decided to erect a museum annex behind the Walker Art Gallery "for the better display of the permanent collection of Ethnographic objects"; it opened in 1882 (Fig. 3).

When objects began to flow into the country after the British sacking of the kingdom of Benin in 1897, Dr. Henry Ogg Forbes, then Director of Liverpool Museum, was one of the first scholars to take an interest in and purchase Benin art (Fig. 4; Karpinski 1984:54). In his article published in 1898, "On a Collection of Cast-Metal Work of High Artistic Value, Lately Acquired for the Mayer Museum," he clearly expresses his admiration for the bronzes: "The wonderful technical art displayed in their construction, their profuse ornamentation, and the high artistic excellence of nearly all of them, quite astonished students of West African ethnology" (Forbes 1898:49).³ Forbes doubted, however, that the sculptures could have been made by Africans, and speculated that they were instead made by "foreigners." Two years later he published a second article, "Cast-Metal Work from Benin," referring again to these objects as art.

The Arnold Ridyard Collection, 1895–1916

The profile of the collection began to change when Arnold Ridyard's first boatload of artifacts arrived from coastal Africa. From 1895 until his retirement in 1916, this maritime engineer assiduously transported 2,481 ethnographic objects to Liver-

5. Head of a Queen Mother. Benin kingdom, Nigeria, early 16th century. Bronze, 35cm (13.8"). Accn 27.11.99.08.

Each Oba of Benin conferred the title of Queen Mother (*Iyoba*) on his mother. This piece, donated by Arnold Ridyard in 1899, is considered to be one of the most important works in Liverpool Museum's collections. Ridyard, a chief engineer on the Liverpool-based Elder Dempster Line, was Liverpool Museum's most committed benefactor at the turn of the century. He donated around 2,500 ethnographic objects over a period of 21 years, including a range of important masks and figurative carvings.

pool Museum from West and Central Africa. Initially he had a taste for wooden masks and figurative sculpture. The single most spectacular piece from the Ridyard collection is an early-sixteenth-century cast-bronze Queen Mother head from Benin (Fig. 5). Donated in 1899, it is now considered to be one of the most important objects in the museum. Ridyard also acquired a variety of Yoruba carvings and genre figures from Nigeria, seven Sande helmet masks from Sierra Leone, five polychrome Douala masks,⁴ groupings of Bafo and Bamileke carvings from Cameroon, three white-faced masks from the Ogowé River area (Figs. 6, 7), and Fang carvings from Gabon. Ridyard seems to have had a particular liking for the so-called nail fetishes (*minkisi*, sing. *nkisi*) made by the Kongo peoples of Central Africa. Altogether there are eight of these power figures in his collection (Figs. 8–10), including a *koso*, or double-headed dog, and around forty carved wooden "fetish" and other figurative carvings from Mayumba, Landana, Banana, and Boma.

Ridyard, it seems, never missed a voyage in all his twenty-one years at sea. According to museum stockbooks, he donated objects in groups every three to four months, each time his ship returned from a voyage to Africa. Over time, with this constant flow back and forth between Liverpool and Africa, the collections came to reflect the ports of call of the Elder Dempster ships, mapping some of the key European trading sites on the coastline at the time. Ridyard's collection is remarkable, not only because it is unusually dense in masks and figurative carving but also because the material is coastal and trade-related rather than provenanced predominantly to British colonial territories. Collections were amassed from regions formerly administered by the French (Fig. 11), Belgians, Germans (Cover), and Portuguese, as well as the British, located between the coastline of Sierra Leone (Fig. 12) and the mouth of the Congo River. The Fang carvings and *nkisi* figures are precisely the types of objects that drew the interests of artists and art critics, such as Vlaminck, Braque, Picasso, Derain, and Apollinaire, who included them in their collections during the first decade of this century. But while the French avant-garde could encounter such sculpture on public display in the museums of Paris, and even acquire such material through networks of dealers and colonial officials, it was rare for a museum in late-nineteenth-century England to gather and exhibit sculpture from Gabon and the then French Congo.

According to Annie Coombes, Liverpool Museum's African collection was one of the "largest and fastest-growing...in Britain from 1890 to 1913, second only to the national collection at the British Museum" (1994:129)—largely because of Ridyard's contributions. The growth in the African holdings decreased dramatically, however, after his retirement. The ethnographic collections would never again have such a single committed benefactor.





6. Mask. Fang(?), Ogowe River area, Gabon. Wood, fiber, pigment; 33cm (13"). Accn 27.11.99.16.

The original museum record states: "Wooden mask, Yaree, painted white, used in pleasure dances." It was presented by Arnold Ridyard in 1899. The objects he collected for the museum were related to the West African coastal trade and therefore did not necessarily originate from British-administered regions.

Between the Wars: Trevor Thomas and the Display of "Primitive Art"

...We have for a long time wallowed in jazz which initially was rooted in West Africa...the tide of artistic opinion has become strong in favour of negro work, and in the Liverpool gallery many fine examples can be seen.

(Thomas 1935c:29)

While there were few additions to the African collection itself after 1916 (Fig. 13), the decades between the wars proved to be a period of great energy and activity in terms of the interpretation and display of the museum's non-European material. Public interest in ethnography was rekindled in 1926 by Liverpool Museum's autumn exhibition of "Primitive Art." This was followed in 1928 by a special exhibition on "Native Ivory Carvings from Africa." In January 1930 a temporary exhibition of the Spenser-Pryse collection of West African paintings was enhanced by material from the Ridyard collection; a new Africa gallery opened to the public soon afterward.

Trevor Thomas, Keeper of Ethnology from 1931 to 1939, in particular developed interests in comparative art, the aesthetics of display, and the relations between Africa and modern art. Not only did he give a variety of lectures on "primitive aesthetics" during this period, but he wrote a range of articles on

ethnographic art and modernist display, including four for the *Museums Journal* alone between 1933 and 1939.

In the first of these articles, "Willow Weavers: A Problem in Presentation" (1933), Thomas addresses general issues of museum presentation, and focuses on a basketry exhibition in particular. In "Modernism in Display," published the following year, he suggests, "The function of the museum as an arbiter of aesthetic taste as well as an aid to the educational development of the public is achieving well-deserved recognition" (1934:221). Here images of old and new displays are compared—the new cases revealing a more symmetrical, linear, less cluttered approach to exhibition design. "Costume Display" (1935a) assesses some of the problems encountered in exhibiting collections of ethnographic and Oriental costume, and again Thomas illustrates his ideas with examples of new simpler, more structured and organized case layouts. In his final piece, "Penny Plain Twopence Coloured, The Aesthetics of Museum Display," Thomas outlines some ideas on rhythm, movement, and form, illustrated with detailed case layouts and gallery designs, explained in terms of "a choreography of specimen arrangement." "The art of display," he concludes, "is primarily a question of communicating an aesthetic experience" (1939:11).

A short article, "Approach to Primitive Art," was published in 1935 (Thomas 1935b), and in the same year he wrote on "How the Department of Ethnology Aids the Study of Racial History." "It is but recently that it has become fashionable to recognise the qualities of primitive art," he contends, and claims Liverpool Museum to be "the proud possessor of one of the finest West African collections in the world...in the Africa Gallery will be found works of art worthy of the finest civilisation" (1935c:29). In the section "The Art of the Negro," Thomas asserts:

The outstanding specimens are the carved masks and fetishes showing a rare appreciation of aesthetic values in the subtlety of their craftsmanship. Many of the figures show a marked affinity to some of the works of Epstein....It is impossible in one short article to convey to readers the infinite stores of beauty and curious knowledge which lie at the very door of our city. They must be seen to be believed.

(Thomas 1935c:29–33)

Thomas published a further article in *Man* on a rare collection of Bafo figures from Cameroon acquired from James Harrison through Ridyard at the turn of the century. In "Variation on a Theme: Analysis of Small Carved Figures from Bali, Cameroons, Africa," he discusses the formal compositions of these unusual sculptures and again reiterates the significance of African art: "If a balance of aesthetic and scientific methods can be applied it is likely to yield valuable insights to the study of primitive art" (1938:33). Writing of the skillful carvings, rhythmic patterns, and motifs of these sculpted forms, Thomas draws analogies between African objects and European sculpture, suggesting



7. Mask. Punu, Gabon. Wood, pigment; 30cm (11.8"). Accn 10.10.95.1.

Believed to be portraits of the deceased, such masks from the former French colony of Gabon were collected at the turn of the century by many of the modernist artists in Paris. This example was presented to the museum by Arnold Ridyard in 1895.

that "it may be profitable to examine the treatment adopted by some modern sculptors such as Henry Moore" (1938:3, 37). This ethnologist in the 1930s reveals a remarkable awareness of recent movements in modern British sculpture—and its connection to the African objects at his museum.

In September 1938 Thomas left Liverpool to spend a year studying museum methods in the United States. Three years later, in 1941, Liverpool Museum was hit by an incendiary bomb during the Blitz, and, tragically, some of the ethnographic material was destroyed in the resultant fire. Attempts were made after 1945 to reconstitute the collections through gifts and purchases. From 1949 to 1953, for example, ethnographic objects were received from the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum, including two Kota reliquary figures from Gabon (Fig. 14), a carved ivory figure of the Virgin Mary (Fig. 15), and Kuba material from what was then the Belgian Congo.



Left:

8. *Nkisi* figure. Kongo peoples, Central Africa. Wood, metal, pigment, glass, cloth; 66cm (26"). Accn 25.5.96.2.

The museum record states: "Wood fetish called Cawso; Landana country, Portuguese Congo." Arnold Ridyard particularly favored the power figures called *minkisi* (sing. *nkisi*). He presented this example in 1896.



Right:

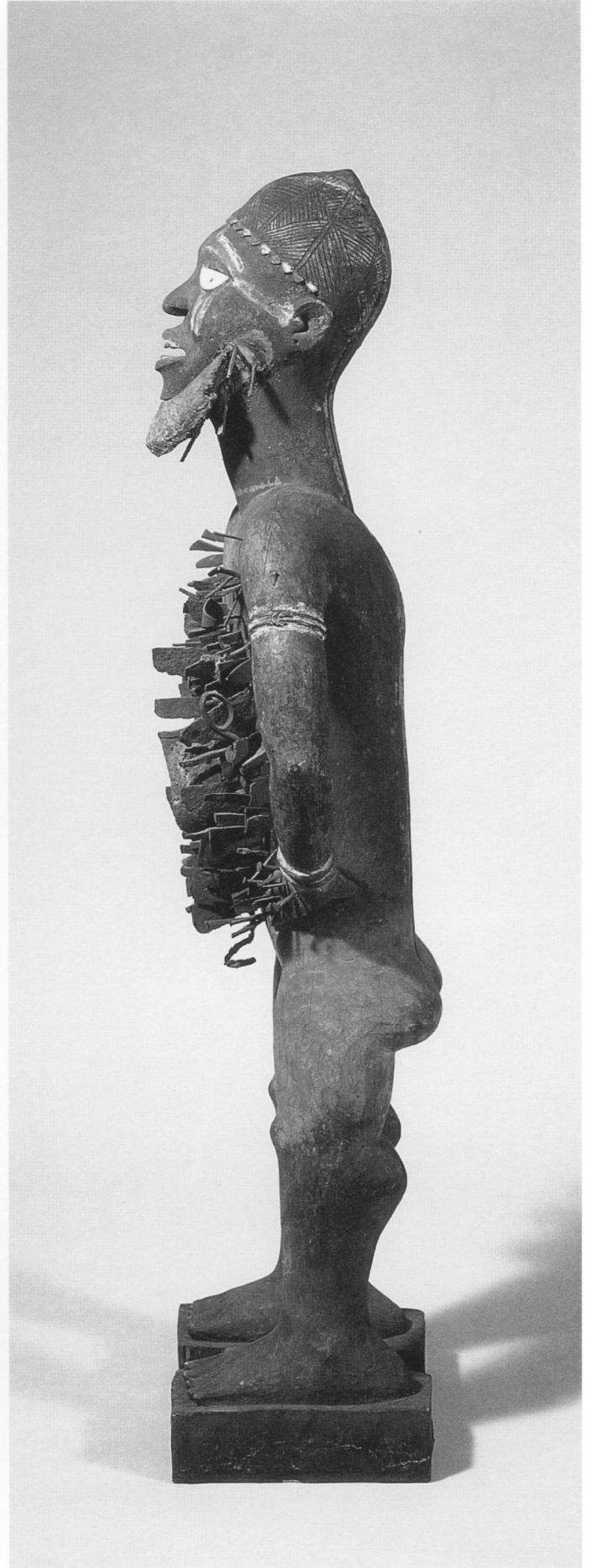
9. *Nkisi* figure. Kongo peoples, Central Africa. Wood, metal, cloth, glass, pigment, vegetal material; 40cm (15.7"). Accn 24.6.1901.3.

So-called nail fetishes like this one, presented by Arnold Ridyard in 1901, were admired by the French avant-garde.

Opposite page:

10. *Nkisi* figure (originally labeled "Mungarka"). Kongo, Central Africa. Wood, nails, half a scissors, mud compound, ceramic, pigment; 44cm (17.3"). Accn 29.5.00.21.

Arnold Ridyard presented this figure to the museum on behalf of Mr. O. Sonnenberg in 1900.





Collecting in the 1960s: The "Classical Style"

The second key period of African acquisitions for Liverpool Museum occurred in the latter half of the 1960s, when a large part of the ethnology allocation of the War Damage Fund was used to purchase material from areas then underrepresented in the collections. Reflecting the collecting policy of the Keeper of Ethnology, Richard Hutchings, the new acquisitions consisted almost entirely of wooden masks and figurative carvings from Africa and elsewhere, chosen for their formal qualities and visual impact (Figs 16, 17, 20). They included a variety of sculptures from the Dogon, Mossi, Lobi, Senufo, Bamana, Bobo, Malinke, Kurumba, Dan, Guro, and Baule bought from art galleries in London, Paris, and Amsterdam. Several Dogon pieces were acquired from the renowned French art dealer Charles Ratton, in whose Paris gallery in the 1930s the Surrealists had held some of their most innovative shows (Fig. 18).

This "primitive art" collection exemplified what some have termed the "classical style" (e.g., Rubin 1984:14). Largely created and validated by French art dealers and artists in the first half of this century, this style favored dark wooden figurative carvings, sculpted naturalism, and Western classical composition in African artifacts. For William Rubin it consisted of "highly refined, often intricate workmanship, beautifully polished or patinated surfaces, and a restrained, stylized realism" (1984:17). Non-naturalistic, often massive, multicolored objects from the Pacific region, by contrast, would stand outside the boundaries of this European-derived aesthetic.

The classical style included certain African art traditions within its parameters of taste. Statuettes and masks from the Dogon, Baule, Dan, Guro (Fig. 19), Senufo, Fang, Kuba, Luba, and Vili peoples, for example, fit the classical mold, although precise preferences varied:

Certain kinds of Fang, Kota, Bambara and Senufo art were favored by both groups (artists and collectors)...collectors consistently prized the "classic" Baule, Guro, Kuba, Luba and Vili material, while generally disdaining the abstract, transformative and transmogrifying styles Picasso liked, as typified...by the work of the Baga and Grebo.

(Rubin 1984:14)

This stylistic preference has endured, even now dominating the pages of such glossy tribal art magazines as *L'Art d'Afrique Noire* and *Tribal Arts*, where Dogon, Baule, and Kongo figures,

Left:

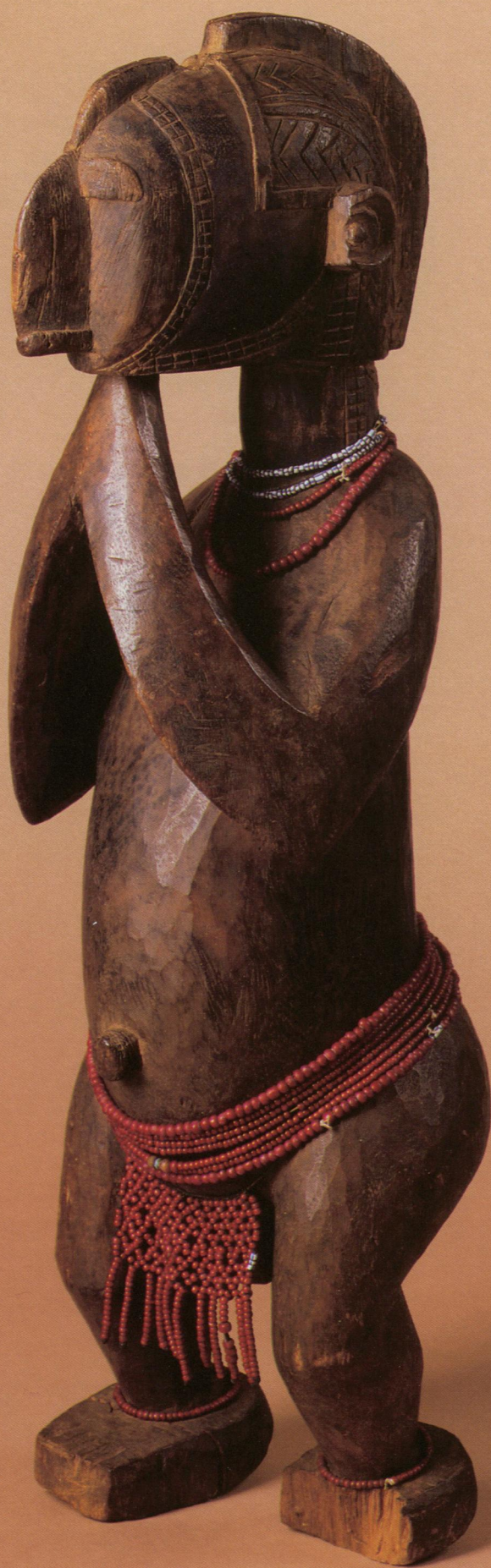
11. Figure. Ogowe River, Gabon. Wood, 51cm (20"). Accn 19.4.98.20.

Arnold Ridyard presented this sculpture in 1898. The Ridyard label suggests it to be a figure from Batanga, Cameroon.

Opposite page:

12. D'mba figure. Baga, Sierra Leone. Wood, beads; 68.5cm (27"). Accn 20.8.97.20.

Such female figures appeared at ceremonies of harvest, marriage, birth, and ancestral commemoration. Picasso owned a similar type of Baga figure. This example was presented by Arnold Ridyard in 1897.





Counterclockwise from top left:

13. Mask. Bamun, Cameroon. Wood, sheet copper, cowries, beads; 58cm (22.8"). Accn 1933.154.

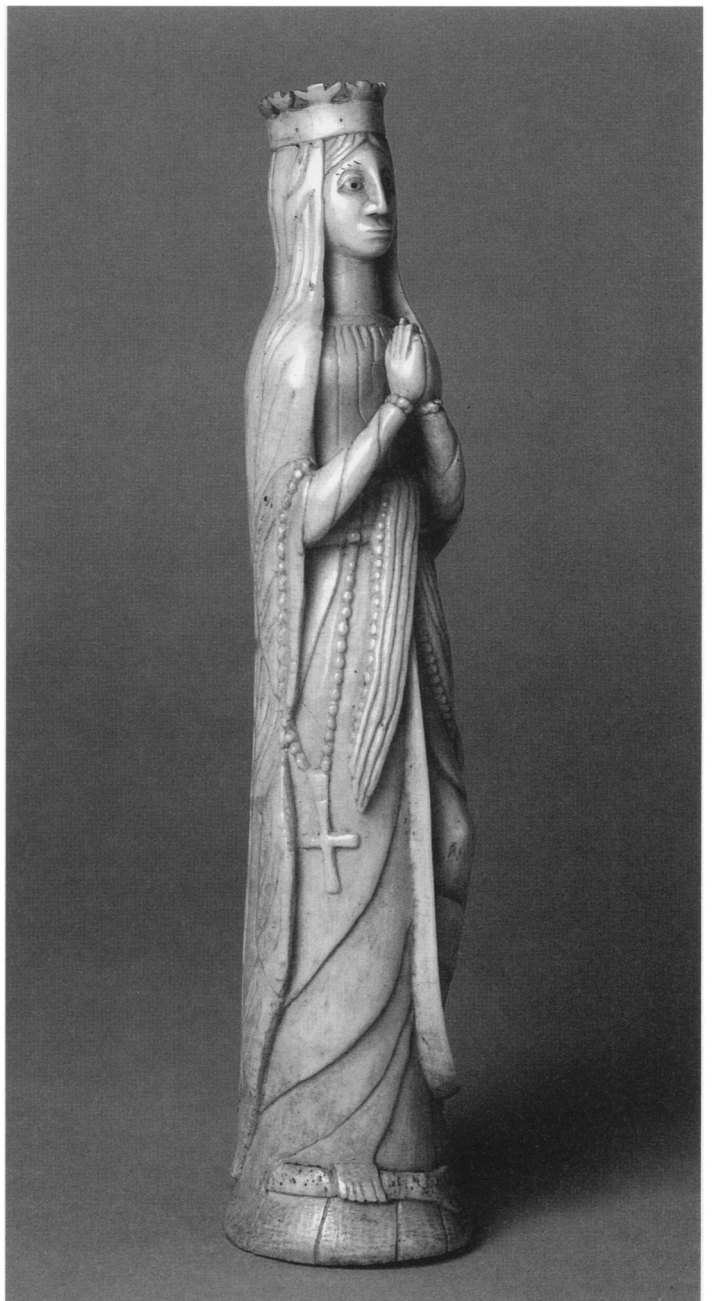
Although relatively few additions to the African collections were made in the 1920s and '30s, this beaded helmet mask is notable. It was presented to the museum by the John Holt Shipping Company in 1933.

14. Reliquary figure. Kota, Gabon. Wood, copper, brass; approx. 50cm (20"). Accn R3846/1936.

Such figures would have been placed on top of bark boxes containing the skulls of ancestors. This piece, originally from the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum, was acquired by Liverpool Museum in 1951 as it attempted to rebuild the ethnographic collections after some material was destroyed during the Blitz.

15. Figure of the Virgin Mary. Angola, 19th century. Ivory, 24.5cm (9.5"). Accn 49.41.82.

Christian and African imagery are combined in this carving, a gift of the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum in 1949. The original label reads "Statuette of Virgin Mary standing on snake—Negro work for a mission."



among many others, lavishly illustrate almost every issue. The objects for sale at the renowned auction houses in New York and Paris are similarly ascribed value by these classical criteria: notions of form, presence, and pedigree are listed as an integral part of the value of these works. A certain age and usage—a patina, a perceived authenticity—are required. Untainted by twentieth-century modernization, such objects were made and used in the nineteenth-century colonial era. Contemporary urban nonritualistic creations, such as haircut signboards, fall outside this connoisseurial category.

The artifacts that fit the classical style are largely from the former French colonies of Africa: Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, and the former French Congo. The collection of the art critic Guillaume Apollinaire consisted almost entirely of objects from France's African empire—and Picasso's and Matisse's taste too revealed a marked preference for pieces of that origin. The col-

Below:

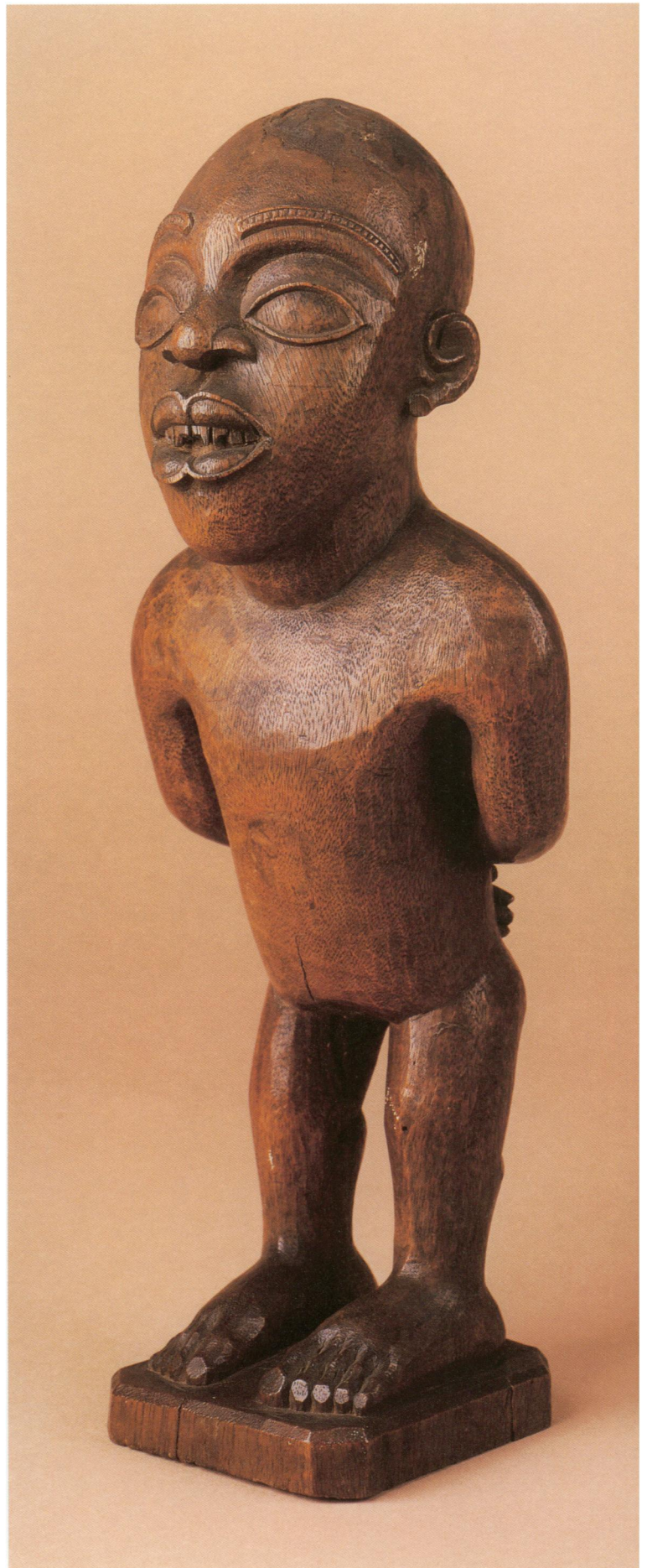
16. Figure. Baule, Côte d'Ivoire. Wood, 21cm (8.3"). Accn 1964.55.6.

This figure was purchased in 1964 during a major period of collecting by the museum.

Right:

17. Figure. Kongo peoples, Democratic Republic of Congo. Wood, pigment; 29cm (11.5"). Accn 1964. 55.9.

This figure was purchased in 1964. Objects acquired during the 1960s collecting period were chosen for their formal qualities, especially those which fit notions of the "classical style."





Left:

18. Ancestor figure. Dogon, Mali, late 18th/early 19th century. Wood, 65cm (26"). Accn 1967.113.1.

The ancestor sits on a stool supported by four figures with upraised arms. The piece was purchased from Charles Ratton's gallery in Paris in 1967 during a major period of acquisitions.

Above:

19. Mask, Guro, Côte d'Ivoire. Wood, bark, iron/steel, pigment; 50cm (19.5"), Accn DPTMP 409.

The "classical style" favored dark wooden carving and polished or patinated surfaces, seen in this mask.

lections that Hutchings amassed in the 1960s for Liverpool Museum also consisted of material from former French colonies and not, as with many other ethnographic collections in the United Kingdom, the legacies of British colonial rule.

In the mid-1960s many of the museum's newly acquired French West African sculptures were displayed in the reception room of the education block. Other important pieces from the ethnology collections were shown in the Treasures Gallery near the entrance. The following decade Hutchings's successor as Keeper of Ethnology, Charles Hunt, curated an exhibition of



African masks and figurative carving at the Walker Art Gallery. "A Still Ecstasy: African Sculpture from Liverpool Museum" (1973) displayed recently acquired material from Mali and Côte d'Ivoire as well as sculptures and masks from Nigeria, Cameroon, Gabon, Angola, and the Democratic Republic of Congo—many of which had been collected by Ridyard and others over half a century before.

Exhibiting "Primitive Art" in the 1970s

New ethnography galleries were opened at Liverpool Museum in February 1976. Although Hutchings had already left, his vision had been for a gallery of "primitive art" which would display many of the fine sculptures acquired in the 1960s. Hunt carried out many of his predecessor's plans.

The African art section of the gallery was organized into both cultural areas and themes. Thematic displays included cases labeled "Europeans in Africa," "Islam in Africa," and "Masquerade." Many objects were presented in individual vitrines and lit to bring out their formal qualities. Cultural areas were exemplified by displays of objects from the Edo, Yoruba (Fig. 21), Igbo, and the Western Sudan (Fig. 22). These were grouped in cases embedded in curvilinear wall units, color coded to distinguish each area. Large photographs and text panels mounted above cases attempted to evoke rather than didactically contextualize the cultural groups on display. The cases devoted to the Western Sudan consisted of sculptures from the Malinke, Mossi, Bobo, Kurumba, Lobi, Bamana, and Dogon, which had been purchased using the previous decade's criteria favoring the classical style. In an adjacent area the display on masquerade exhibited Senufo masks and a costume from Côte d'Ivoire, a costume and masks from the Sande society of the Mende of Sierra Leone, Ijo and Igbo masks from Nigeria, and a group of brightly painted Douala masks from Cameroon. Overall this Africa gallery was dominated by the museum's wooden masks and figurative sculpture, and by the cast bronzes and carved ivories from Benin; this aesthetic perspective was distinctive and unusual for a natural history-oriented, local government museum in Britain in the 1970s.

Most notable perhaps was the gallery of "Primitive Art," which included around twenty objects from various parts of the non-European world. Chosen for their aesthetic impact, almost all were individually cased. For the subsequent Keeper, Yvonne Schumann, the focus on art and aesthetics was considered the most suitable method to show the quality of these collections: "It is hoped to present the sculptures untrammelled by text to encourage visitors to study art forms from Africa, the Americas, Oceania and Indonesia," she writes in her introduction to the displays. "The term *Art Gallery* indicates the simple, almost clinical background which allows the objects to stand alone, to 'speak for themselves' " (Schumann n.d.:4, 7).

This gallery, consisting predominantly of dark wooden figurative sculpture, was deliberately placed next to the display of

20. Figure. Baule, Côte d'Ivoire. Wood, beads; 38.7cm (15.3"). Accn 1966.109.2.

This work was purchased in 1966. Like most of the other sculptures acquired during the 1960s, it is from a former French colony and fits the notion of the "classical style."



Top:

21. Part of the cultural-area display devoted to the Yoruba in the Africa Gallery at Liverpool Museum, installed in the 1970s and still on view today. Large photographs and text panels mounted above cases attempt to evoke rather than didactically contextualize the culture.

Bottom:

22. The Africa Gallery at Liverpool Museum, which opened in 1976, was noticeable for its focus on individual pieces and "primitive art." Objects were isolated in cases and lit to enhance their formal qualities. The area devoted to the Western Sudan, dismantled in the 1980s, included many of the Malinke, Kurumba, Lobi, Bamana, and Dogon carvings purchased in the previous decade.

Classical marble statues donated by Henry Blundell. This juxtaposition—of light and dark, marble and wood, European and non-European—was intended to provoke visual comparison. A photograph of *The Dancer* by Picasso was displayed near a case of Fang and Kota reliquary figures from Gabon in an attempt to trace formal influence and affinity (Fig. 23).⁵

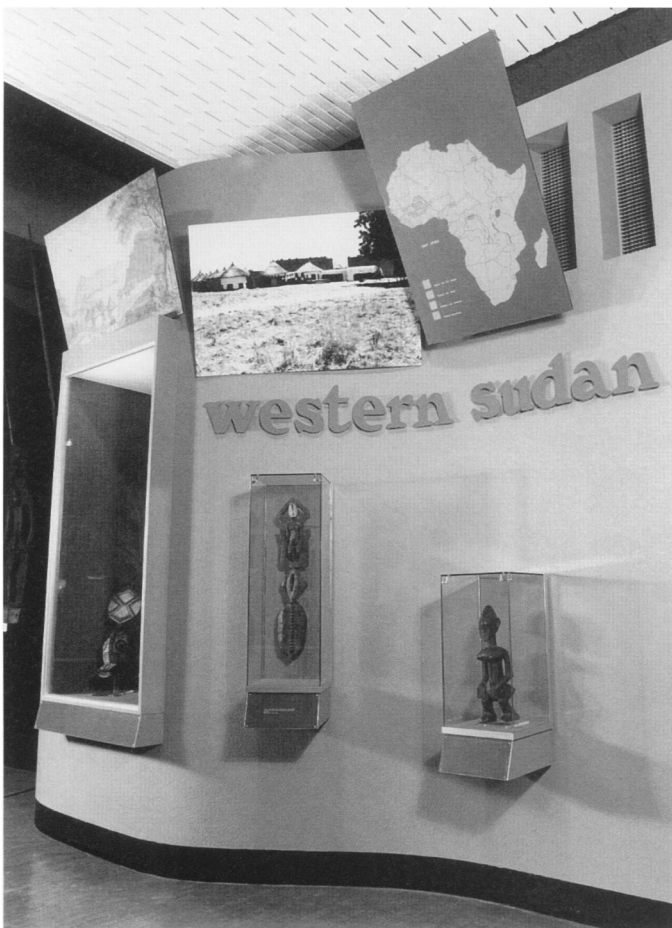
While the sections devoted to Edo, Igbo, and Yoruba cultures remain to this day, the Primitive Art gallery, along with the Western Sudan and Masquerade galleries, was dismantled in the early 1980s, to be replaced in due course by a display on the Americas. Many of Liverpool Museum's finest sculptures from Africa were subsequently put into storage.

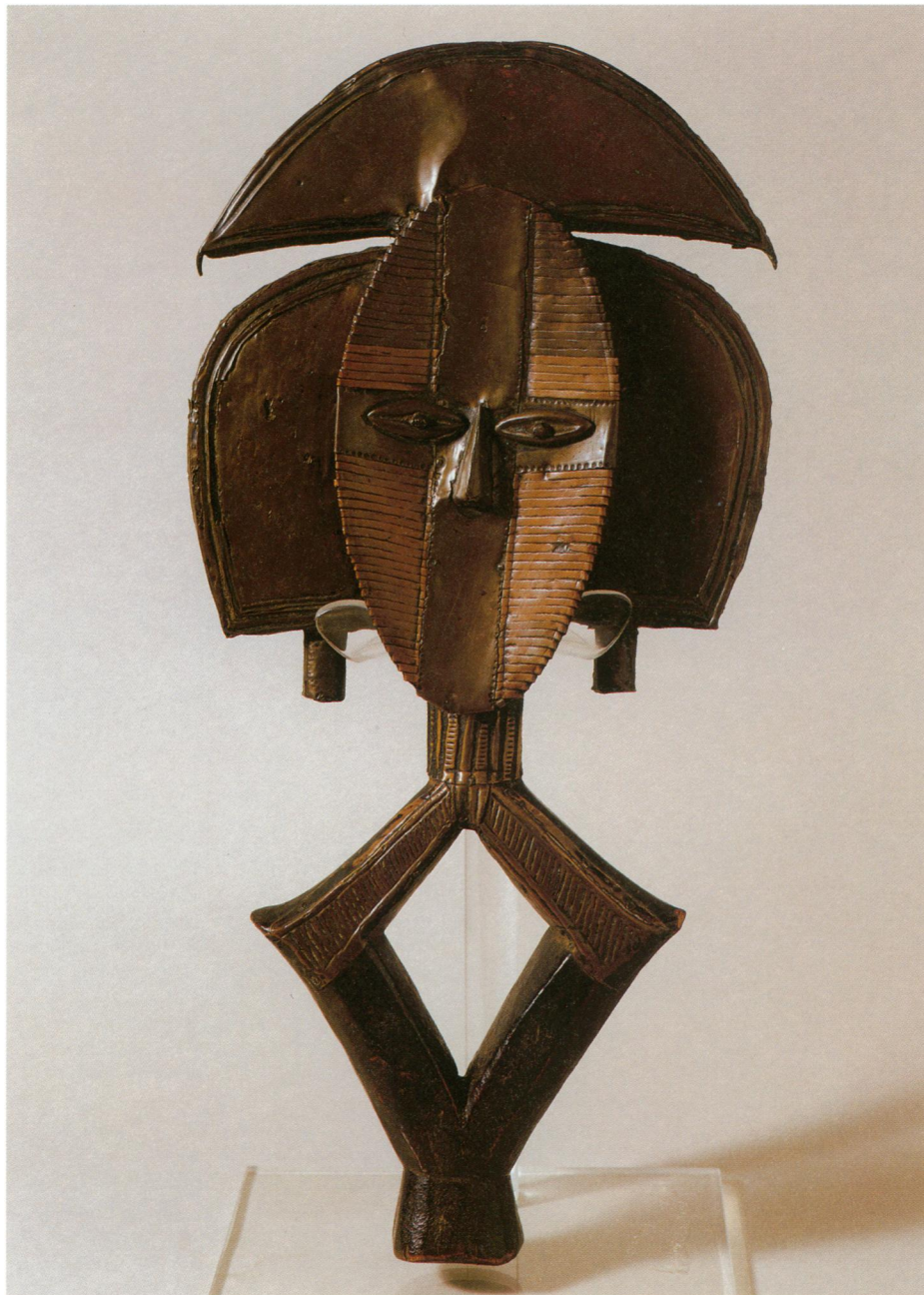
Exhibiting African Art in the 1980s–1990s

Over the past decade, some of the key sculptures and masks from the reserve collections have nevertheless been loaned to a range of art exhibitions, both national and international. In 1988, for example, a Dogon mask, along with objects from the Pacific and the Americas, appeared in the "Surrealism" exhibition at the Tate Gallery, Liverpool. In 1991 the South Bank Centre's National Touring Exhibition, "Exotic Europeans," included Asante goldweights, a Benin bronze armband, an Igbo bust of the traveler and writer Mary Kingsley, a Yoruba figure of Queen Victoria, and an engraved calabash from Sierra Leone; some of these had been acquired by Ridyard. Significantly, although "Exotic Europeans" displayed artifacts from Liverpool Museum's ethnography collections, the exhibition was held at the Walker Art Gallery next door.

In "Expressions of Belief: African, Oceanic and Indonesian Art from the Museum voor Volkenkunde, Rotterdam," held at Liverpool Museum (November 19, 1992–April 18, 1993), non-European artifacts were conceptualized as works of art. The major international touring exhibition "Africa Explores," initiated by the Center for African Art, New York, was shown at the Tate Gallery, Liverpool, a year later and included objects from Liverpool Museum's African collection: one of Ridyard's *minkisi*, as well as three figurative carvings and two Kota reliquary figures.

Most recently a group of Central African figurative carvings and a Kota reliquary figure were chosen for "The Spirit of Cubism" exhibition, which opened at the Tate Gallery, Liverpool, in May (closing in April 1999). Rather than being presented merely for their formal affinity with Cubism, these sculptures will be exhibited, along with Cézanne's work, as one of the crucial influences on Picasso and Braque.





23. Reliquary figure. Kota, Gabon, late 19th century. Wood, copper alloy; 60cm (23.5"). Accn R3848/1936.

This figure was displayed near a photograph of *The Dancer* by Picasso as part of the "Primitive Art" gallery at Liverpool Museum in the 1970s. It is currently exhibited, along with works by Cézanne, in "The Spirit of Cubism" show at the Tate Gallery, Liverpool (May 1998–April 1999), as one of the key influences on Picasso and Braque.

The African objects at Liverpool Museum have been collected, conceptualized, and displayed throughout this century as works of art—an unusual approach for a British museum in the early decades of this century, but one that is even more significant considering the composition of the institution itself. Because of the predominance of its natural history collections, Liverpool Museum has always tended to prioritize science over art, didactic/contextual approaches over more aesthetic/formal perspec-

tives. Other divisions delimiting art and sculpture collections to the Art Galleries on Merseyside (the Walker Art Gallery and the Lady Lever Art Gallery) could, in theory, have further removed these African collections from a concern with art historical language and aesthetic taste. Despite their museological classifications, however, objects of African origin at Liverpool Museum have, as we have seen, been treated as equal in formal power to European sculpted forms.

Although it is still possible to see the Benin bronzes and ivories and the Yoruba and Igbo sculptures on the second floor of the museum, many of the finest sculptures and masks from the African collection remain in storage. However, the National Museums & Galleries on Merseyside was recently awarded a major grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund which will enable these important collections to be put back on public display. □

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different ways.² More serious still is the following example. In the course of their discussion of the imagery of the bull, a central symbol in Joola ritual life, the authors write (p. 263, my italics):

The preservation and display of the horns of sacrificed bulls is said to still have been widespread in Joola extended family compounds in the 19th century, and is encountered today in certain older compounds in Kasa, as our examples show. *These horns are also sometimes hung on the outside walls around the house as signs of the wealth and strength of the ancestors whose footsteps the younger generations are invited to follow.*

This passage sounded very familiar to me. Indeed it should have. In my *Cultural, Economic, and Religious History of the Basse Casamance* (1985:37), I quoted a priest from the Holy Ghost Fathers, himself writing in 1885:

One sees, all around on the walls of the house, cattle horns which, they say, hang there so that their children may see that their ancestors had large herds, and to inspire them to follow in their footsteps.

Imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery, but I would have appreciated a footnote. There is none; nor are the archives of the Holy Ghost Fathers listed anywhere in the bibliography. The reader will also note that the time reference (1885) has been lost in Bourdier and Trinh's version, thereby transposing the statement to the present. Cattle horns are still hung on the outer walls of some Kasa houses, but the authors are here using a 100-year-old text to interpret their meaning. That is quite a long ethnographic present!

These lapses in scholarly method are troubling. I hope the problems are limited to the chapter on the Joola, where I was able to identify them. Other scholars, specialists on the Fulbe and the Sereer, will be better judges of the scholarship in the other sections of this book. □

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ORIXÁS: OS DEUSES VIVOS DA AFRICA (ORISHAS: THE LIVING GODS OF AFRICA IN BRAZIL)

Abdias do Nascimento

IPEAFRO/Afrodiaspora, Rio de Janeiro, 1995. Text in Portuguese and English. 170 pp., 74 color photos, glossary, references, bibliography, list of exhibitions. \$79.95 hardcover.

Reviewed by Daniel J. Crowley

To some degree, the social structure of Brazil today is what we might have if the South had won the Civil War: a small and infinitely wealthy white landed elite, a smallish professional class largely descended from relatively

recently arrived European (and Japanese) immigrants, and an immense and immobile underclass of mostly mixed African, native American, and European ancestry. Although at least seventy percent of Brazilians are part African, degree-of-color prejudice ("the lighter the better") is universal. In such a context, this coffee-table book is a bit unusual, documenting as it does the life and works of an 83-year-old Afro-Brazilian painter who has spent his life fighting to identify, present, and defend the African elements in Brazilian culture. Described as a "poet, scholar, dramatist, essayist, politician, propagandist, and organizer," Abdias do Nascimento is also a fine painter who portrays the symbols and figures of the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé or Macumba religion brought by Yoruba slaves, who syncretized their hierarchy of gods with Catholic saints. Along with Cuban Santería and Haitian Vodun, Candomblé today is spreading rapidly throughout the New World among people of every ancestry bored with the perceived rigidities and ineffectualness of Christian sects.

Readers of this journal have been attracted to African cultures by their sculptures and textiles, the infinitely complex significance and functions of which have considerably less appeal than their beauty. The seventy-two paintings reproduced in *Orixás* were intended to produce entirely different aesthetic responses in their viewers. Many are squarely geometric, bold presentations of masklike faces of the gods such as Oshun (pl. 27, p. 68) or their symbols, such as the bow and arrow of the hunter goddess Oshossi (pl. 45, p. 102) from which sprout vines and leaves, or an abstract design derived from Asante *adinkra* ideograms (pl. 10, p. 30) more often used to decorate cloth. Others are almost cartoonlike, with stick figures (pls. 16, 17; pp. 47, 48) carrying out ritual activities, others with biblical reference, such as *Adam and Eve: Oshunmare* (pl. 24, p. 60.) Always brightly colored and skillfully executed, at their best they are charming and striking (e.g., *Oshunmare*, goddess of the rainbow as both human and mermaid, pl. 21, pp. 53–54); all too often, however, they appear to be over-complex geometric patterns projecting little of their mystical power to the uninitiated viewer.

But Nascimento is more a political activist than a religious zealot, and he constantly reiterates the cruel history of the Africans in Brazil. Indeed, this book is dedicated to the rebel slave Zumbi of the maroon community of Palmares on the third centennial of his death on November 20, 1695, and points out the outstanding work of such Afro-Brazilian artists of the past as Aleijadinho, Mestre Valentim, and Manuel da Cunha. After founding the Black Experimental Theater in 1944 and the Black Arts Museum in 1968, Nascimento spent ten years in the United States as Chair of African Culture in the New World at the Puerto Rican Studies and Research Center, State University of New York at Buffalo; he also painted and exhibited extensively during this period. On his return, after founding the Afro-Brazilian Studies and

Research Institute (IPRAFRO) in 1982, he was elected to the Brazilian Congress, later to the Senate, then to the Secretariat for the Defense and Promotion of Afro-Brazilian Peoples (SEAFRO) and the Rio de Janeiro State Council of Culture, where he continues his fight against the absorption of his black countrymen into "a compulsorily half-breed, homogenized 'Brazilianess'" (p. 31)—fighting words to Brazilian nationalists.

The book begins with the author's praise-poem for the "Freedomfighter Eshu" (anti-establishment trickster god), a foreword by Molefi Kete Asante, exponent of Afrocentrism at Temple University, and a preface by Nascimento's translator (and wife), and two articles by Nascimento on Candomblé. What follows are more than seventy-two brilliant color plates (some fold-out) of his paintings, interspersed with thirteen adulatory but informative essays about Nascimento and his works published over the last three decades by eight Brazilians, a Nigerian, a Ghanaian, an Argentine, and two North Americans. After a final poem to Oxala (usually "God the Father" but to Nascimento "O King Oshala, mother of God, penis and vagina, progeny's source, not excised nor circumcised..."), there is a valuable glossary of the all-too-little-known Candomblé terms used. Indeed, this volume gives access to a world—and a world view—about which we know little. □

notes

TYTHACOTT: Notes, from page 35

[This article was accepted for publication in April 1998.]

I am grateful to Charles Hunt, Lynne Stumpe, and Edmund Southworth for commenting on the text, and to Roger Bailey and Dudley Reynolds for their assistance in research.

1. André Derain visited the ethnographic museum in Paris in 1904 and the African sections of the British Museum in 1906. German Expressionists—Kirchner, Nolde, Schmidt-Rottluf, Pechstein, and Marc—were also inspired by the African objects at the ethnographic museums in Dresden and Berlin in the first decade of the century.
2. Gatty was Curator from 1873 to 1884. From a report submitted to Liverpool's Library and Museum Committee, September 7, 1880.
3. Two years later he published a second article, "Cast-Metal Work from Benin," referring again to these objects as art (Forbes 1900:13–14).
4. Ridyard originally transported a Douala boat which is now believed to be housed at the National Museum of African Art, Washington, D.C.
5. A gallery handout written for teachers in the 1970s explained: "Between the Classical Sculptures and this section is a small case showing a reproduction of the painting, 'The Dancer,' by the European Cubist artist Picasso, next to its 'primitive' inspiration—Fang and Kota reliquary figures from Africa."

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WOLFF & WARREN: Notes, from page 49

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The authors thank the head priest of the Agbeni Shango shrine, Olaniyan Omigbiki, as well as Mary Salawuh Warren, Olatunje Badmus, and Yemi Adeyemo for assistance in interviews and translation, and Robert Farris Thompson and Babatunde Lawal for sharing field photographs and insights. Thanks also to Roy Sieber and Roslyn Walker for calling attention to the current location of seven of the posts in the collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts, and to Michael Kan of that institution for his cooperation.

1. Wilfred Hamblly, of Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History, went to the shrine shortly before Meyerowitz did; his trip is documented by a photograph in the museum archives (Fig. 11). The various visits are reported in Meyerowitz (1946), Parrinder (1953), Gordon & Lancaster (1961), Thompson (1993), Pemberton (1989), and Lawal (personal communication, 1985). A photograph by Pierre Verger is reproduced in Delange (1967: pl. 77).

2. For a detailed analysis of the structure and iconography of the Shango altar itself, see Meyerowitz (1946:30-31), Pemberton (1989:166), Thompson (1993:232-245), and Lawal (1970).

3. Oluyole ruled from 1836 to 1850 according to Lloyd (1967:59).

4. The market referred to is Oja Iba. Iba is a shortened form of (I)bashorun, the title Oluyole brought to Ibadan. In Oluyole's time it was the major meeting point for long-distance traders, including those who dealt in slaves, ivory, European goods, and crafts (Awe 1967:16). Ibadan's praise song (*oriki*) also refers to the city as Oluyole's home:

Ibadan, home of warriors!
Pay homage before you enter her
Ibadan, home of warrior-chieftains
'T is also the home of Oluyole.

(Morgan n.d.:67)

5. In their survey of "Orisha houses in Ibadan," Gordon and Lancaster (1961) mention a "rather neglected temple" in Oke Foko with no carvings or decoration. This appears to support the oral tradition locating the original shrine in Oke Foko. Gordon and Lancaster also mention a third shrine at Inalede with three carved pillars, the vestige of a carving screen.

6. The importance of the dog motif is evidenced in Bascom's documentation of the carving of a Shango staff in Meko (Bascom 1973).

7. In his survey of *orisha* shrines, Parrinder located Shango shrines in Isale Osi, Inalede; Isale Ijebu, near the Olubadan's compound; Kudeti; Oke Foko; Daelu's compound, Ade-Oyo; and a shrine by Mapo Church (Parrinder 1953:199).

8. Parrinder's captions misidentify the left and right wings of the shrine; the captions for his figures 3 and 4 (Parrinder 1953: opp. p. 21) should be transposed.

9. The pigments used are camwood powder, white clay, and indigo dye obtained by soaking *aso waji*, a cloth often used in ritual contexts, in water (Omigbiki, personal communication, 1974). Meyerowitz suggested that blood was also sometimes daubed on all the carvings (1946:31).

10. The caretakers of the shrine are reluctant to talk about what happened, but this development seems to point to a then prevalent practice of selling old carvings to traders and collectors and replacing them with newly carved duplicates. Omigbiki told us in 1974 that several carvings in the Agbeni shrine apparently disappeared after they had been removed from their position so that the portal above the shrine could be remodeled because "people were always bumping their heads." The middleman, referred to by the head priest in 1974 as "the old man," saw himself as following the old practice of replacing older "spoiled" carvings with new ones. In her work with carvers in Abeokuta between 1972 and 1975, Wolff saw similar cases where traders and local entrepreneurs had old carvings duplicated for their Yoruba owners before these antiquities were sold to collectors (Wolff 1985).

11. For example, a person accused by another of wrongdoing is taken to the altar to swear his or her innocence or to acknowledge the crime or sin. Omigbiki may be called upon to ask Shango to use lightning to destroy the compound of an unrepentant guilty party. Omigbiki then goes to compounds that have been hit by lightning to find evidence of the thun-

der god's visit in the form of stone celts or thunder stones (*edun ara*), and carries out rituals and offers sacrifices of propitiation. In another context, those afflicted with sickness or misfortune come to the priest to ask for healing medicine imbued with Shango's power. Here again the ceremony focuses on the altar, where medicine is made by soaking thunder stones in palm oil, which is then rubbed on the supplicant's body. In yet another scenario, women seeking to have children kneel down in front of the altar to importune the deity and become his worshippers.

12. Our efforts to elicit fuller discussion of the carvings were frustrated by problems similar to those encountered by Wescott and Morton-Williams when they attempted to analyze the meaning of the Yoruba *laba Shango*. "The worshippers were only able to describe its use; they could not interpret the decoration as a whole or by parts in terms of any of their explanatory systems. Shango worshippers are particularly averse to intellectual approaches and their ritual symbolic forms are often preserved without explanation and even without a myth supporting their meaning" (Wescott & Morton-Williams 1962:23).

13. Between the visits by Meyerowitz in 1937 and Parrinder around 1950, this carving, which appears to be sitting in front of the screen in Meyerowitz's photos, was moved to the far left of the screen, replacing a post depicting *ijimere*, a monkey eating a corn cob. A second post depicting *ijimere* was also removed from the left wing. Parrinder's photographs show one of these reinserted into the right wing.

14. In the Frobenius photos it appears that this post was originally positioned to the far right of the screen.

15. The hands were broken off this figure prior to Meyerowitz's visit. It is likely that in the original carving, they held paraphernalia associated with Shango. The hands laid flat on the body were restored in the replacement carving.

16. See Thompson (1974) and Wolff (1990) for further discussion of the importance of the sitting posture.

17. Thompson identifies the quality of *odo* as a major criterion of the Yoruba aesthetic. The subject must appear to be at the height of physical power; usually the representation is of a youth entering adulthood (Thompson 1971a:3/3).

18. The painting of the sculpture is also evidence of *pipe*, a reference to the ritual completeness of an artwork. *Pipe* alludes to the ritual potency and functioning of a ritual object which is assured through such activities as chanting, making offerings, ritual bathing, regular "feeding," and in this case redecorating (Abiodun 1983:23). While the carvings of the screen and altar are not prime foci of ritual, they are dedicated to the deity. As such, they are still periodically repainted to renew and enhance their aura of power and respect.

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ORAM: Notes, from page 57

[This manuscript was accepted for publication in January 1997.]

From 1991 to the present the focus of my research has been the history and development of the lantern tradition in Freetown. I collected information on the float traditions in The Gambia between 1986 and 1989. I should like to thank the executive members of the Young Men's Muslim Association and the members and builders of the various clubs in Freetown and in The Gambia who have so willingly helped me in my research. I am particularly grateful to Mr. Abdoulaye Bayo and Mr. M. S. Tejan Cole, without whose assistance my work would not have been possible.

1. The use of lanterns in end-of-Ramadan celebrations had spread to the Port Loko and Kambia Districts of Sierra Leone by at least the 1930s, and thereafter to other areas of the country. The civil war prevented me from studying traditions outside Freetown.

2. According to John Nunley, lanterns were first introduced in Freetown in the 1930s (Nunley 1985:45). However, the earliest record of lantern floats being paraded at the end of Ramadan dates from 1895 (*Sierra Leone Times*, March 30, 1895). In the 1990s several elderly informants in Freetown described to me floats that were made in their youth (in a few cases as early as the 1920s); I later found them mentioned in contemporary newspaper reports. Everyone I talked to insisted that they had "met" lanterns as children (i.e., that the tradition existed before they were born). This evidence, together with the float descriptions in the *Sierra Leone Times* of 1895 and 1896, indi-